

Fur Flying Free!

Dr. Chloe Long

This month's article has an itchy theme, being all about shedding and fur loss in degus. Around this time of year, our pet degu should be well into their summer coat shed, moulting out their slightly longer, thicker winter fur for a nice fine and shiny summer coat.

During this time it is quite normal for your degu to scratch a lot more than usual (shedding your coat can be very itchy!), and also for there to be a lot of loose hair around the cage. You will also notice dark lines appear over your degus' bodies, which is the 'shed line' where the old coat stops and the new coat begins- this line usually appears first over the nose, and gradually moves back along the head and back or the degu toward the rump. It can take several weeks for a degu to shed their coat completely, and during this time giving them more frequent access to a clean dustbath will really help them!

So what signs should you look out for to tell you something isn't right?

- Bald patches that appear anywhere on your degu are not normal. Even a degu that is shedding will never develop any bald areas where you can see the skin. The most common reason for bald patches in degus is due to fur-pulling, which is where the degu will sit and pull their own hairs out (or those of a cagemate) during grooming. This is habit that is formed through some sort of stress the degu is suffering and it needs looking into as soon as possible.



- Areas of flaky or red, weeping skin can indicate the degu has an allergy to something, such as bedding or cage cleaning fluids. Frequent itching is also a warning sign that you should ask your vet to check for mites, which you can't see without magnification. Mites can also cause patchy hairloss all over the degu's body and can be transferred easily between degus, so get these signs checked by your vet if you notice them, and treat all the degus in your home at the same time.
- If your degu is not shedding at all and their coat is looking drab and thick even in the summer, this can indicate that the light levels of the room they are kept in are not good enough. The shedding process is regulated by the action of light on a particular hormone in degus, called 'melatonin' which humans have too (ever had jet-lag? That is also caused by changes to your melatonin levels!). If your degus' room is dark then this hormone will not be affected in the normal way by changes in day length, so shedding will not be triggered in late spring/early summer. Try to move your degu cage to a brighter room with more natural light, but never put your degu cage in direct sunlight for longer than a few minutes or your degu could overheat.

To learn more about fur-pulling in degus, visit the following page of Degutopia's website:
www.degutopia.co.uk/degufurpull.htm

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<http://www.degutopia.co.uk>



~Dedicated to the health and well-being of degus everywhere~